

Cherry Blossoms

Rev. Takahashi, March 2016

After I came to Kauai several years ago, I had chances to see the beautiful cherry blossoms in Kokee during this season. When I first heard that I could see the cherry blossoms, I was really looking forward to going up there, because the cherry blossoms are often considered as a kind of special flower in Japan. Since they are in full bloom only for a short period, many people try not to miss seeing the flowers and enjoy looking at them. Even the TV weather forecast says when cherry blossoms are to be in full bloom. The cherry blossoms always make me feel that the spring has come. It also makes me remember the famous episode of Shinran Shonin's childhood.

Shinran Shonin was born in 1173 and became a monk at the age of nine. To become a monk or a minister, it is required to observe the ordination ceremony or Tokudo. This rule has never changed since the old days.

One day, he was determined to receive the Tokudo ordination and visited a Buddhist temple in Kyoto. However, when he arrived there, the evening was drawing near. Therefore a minister of the temple said to him, "I will officiate at the ceremony tomorrow. Please come again."

Nevertheless, Shinran Shonin stayed in the temple, then he made a short poem and read it to him. His poem is: "Cherry Blossoms that are felt to last till the morrow, may blow away tonight." Shinran Shonin wanted to express his thought to the minister. He meant, "Even if the cherry blossoms are in full bloom now, it would fall tomorrow, just as people's hearts and lives often change." After Shinran Shonin read the poem, the minister was really shocked at his strong determination. Then he quickly changed his mind and officiated at the Tokudo ceremony. This is the episode of Shinran Shonin and cherry blossoms.

His poem would give us the important lessons. Reflected on my daily life, I often think, "I still have a time. I can do this later," then I tend to be in a hurry at the last minute. If we continue putting off what we can do today, it would be late to accomplish important things. Actually, it may be difficult for us to do everything immediately. However, we would be reminded of something important from Shinran Shonin's poem. Buddhism teaches us that everything is impermanent and is changing all the time. We probably think that we can keep our life tomorrow like we have it today. However, nobody can tell what will happen in our life over night or even in next moment. It would be difficult to accept this truth. However, it would make us attempt to listen to the truth and how to live our unrepeatable life.

The story of Shinran Shonin teaches us the importance of doing what we can do today, while comparing the cherry blossoms with our lives. Especially, the story shows us that we must listen to the Buddha Dharma without delay. Rennyō Shonin who is the 8th Abbot of Hongwanji emphasized the right attitude to learn the Buddhism. He said, "In the Buddhist teachings, there is no tomorrow. Hurry up, hurry up with what pertains to the Buddha's teachings." He emphasized the importance of listening to the teaching now.

It is sometimes said that flowers as well as the cherry blossoms are beautiful because they do their best to be in bloom each moment. Let us continue listening to the teaching of Nembutsu and fully live our everyday lives.

Namo Amida Butsu.